For the Record . . .

From Secretary of State Rogers' press conference Thursday, Dec. 23:

Q: Mr. Secretary . . . There appears to have been a sharp escalation in the air war over North Vietnam, including American strikes much closer to Hanoi than there have been in many months. Can you tell us what in the administration's view is the cause of that, and what its policy is, and will be in '72, on air activity in the north?

A: Well, I think the cause is quite clear. The cause is that the Vietnamization program has worked well and that the North Vietnamese are unsuccessful in their attempts to attack our troops in South Vietnam or, for that matter, in their attempts to make military progress in South Vietnam.

In order to take some military action that holds out a greater prospect for success from their standpoint, they have undertaken to attack Laos and Cambodia. And they, I am sure, will do what they can to dramatize those attacks, but to me it is a clear indication of the failure of their military activity in South Vietnam.

Certainly the willingness of the North to attack Laos and Cambodia — neutral nations—in order to do this, shows that they are far removed from their principal objective. Their objective is to conquer South Vietnam.

Now, what will our response be? Well, we are going to continue the President's policy of supporting the South Vietnamese in Cambodia, and we will continue to give air support in Laos to interdict the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and to give air support in northern Laos, because we think it is essential for the continuation of the Vietnamization program . . .

Q: Mr. Secretary, to follow up on that point, sir, does the intensified fighting in Laos and Cambodia and the increased U.S. air activtiy over North Vietnam confound or contradict the U.S. strategy and expectations of winding down the war?

A: No, not at all. I don't think it is fair to say that the activity has increased. I think its character has changed somewhat. I don't think the activity is any greater than it was. No, it is a continuation of the programs that we have followed in the past.